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Religious Laws Generally Applicable to All Biblically-Mandated Jewish Holy Days

Jewish Holy days other than the Sabbath generally fall under one of three categories:

- (1) Holy Days set forth in the Bible itself (Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, Passover and Shavuot), during which work proscriptions apply that are generally similar to the Sabbath (**Note that individual Holy Days may require particular observances not included in this general report (e.g., “Shofar” on Rosh Hashanah; “Sukkah” and “Lulav” on Sukkot; a “Seder” and “Matzo,” etc. on Passover);**
- (2) Festivals mandated by Rabbinic decree (Chanukah and Purim), during which work generally is not proscribed in the same manner as on the Sabbath; and
- (3) Fast days, during which work generally is not proscribed. *But see* Yom Kippur (a holiday and fast day during which work is absolutely proscribed) and the Ninth Day of Av (work and business generally proscribed in the morning hours).

Start and End of Biblically-Mandated Holidays

Biblically-mandated holidays begin 18 minutes before sunset on the previous evening and end approximately one hour after sunset on their last day.

Candle Lighting at the Start of Biblically-Mandated Holidays

Each Biblically-mandated festival is sanctified by the lighting of two candles on the eve of each Holy day. CODE OF JEWISH LAW (“C.J.L.”) chs. 75; 103 §4.

Observant Jews must put all work aside and light the Holiday candles at least one-half hour before the stars emerge, *i.e.*, eighteen minutes prior to sunset. C.J.L. ch. 75 §1.

In no event should less than two candles be lit. The candles should be large enough to burn at least until after the evening meal.

Generally the women in the household light the Holiday candles. Men are equally obliged to light the Holiday candles when there are no women in the household to light them.

The Holiday candles preferably should be lit in the room where the meals are served, in order to indicate that they are lit in honor of the Holiday.



Work Proscriptions On Biblically-Mandated Holidays

Work proscriptions for Biblically-mandated festivals are generally the same as for the Sabbath, except for more lenient rules governing the use of fire and the preparation of food. C.J.L. ch. 98. *See generally id.* chs. 98-99, 101-102. The specific prohibitions of festivals and their differences from the Sabbath are beyond the scope of this report. Competent Rabbinic authorities should be

About the Aleph Institute

In 1978, and on many additional occasions, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, called for attention to the Jewish population in prisons. Rabbi Schneerson, who was the first religious leader in history honored with the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, spoke publicly and published entire treatises dedicated to the moral, ethical, spiritual and educational needs for men and women in those and other institutional environments. For example, a person going through prison with meaning and growth—though very difficult—leaves as a better, more productive and balanced citizen. Thus, the creation of the Aleph Institute.

Since 1981, the Aleph Institute, under the direction of Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar, has provided valuable services to assist chaplains and institutional staff in meeting the legitimate religious needs of Jewish men and women in their care. The Aleph Institute provides answers to questions about mandated religious practices and ritual materials for daily and holiday observances. Aleph’s staff, affiliated Rabbis and rabbinical students provide visitations to Jews in institutional environments around the country and to military bases around the world. Over the years, Aleph has also supplied hundreds of thousands of religious texts and ritual items for use by individuals and chapels.

consulted with individual questions.

Generally, any work that is forbidden on the Sabbath is also forbidden on a Biblically-mandated festival. The festival differs from the Sabbath only with regard to the preparation of food, as it is written: “Only that which is eaten by any soul, this alone may be prepared by you” (Exodus 12:16). Thus, kneading, baking, and cooking are permitted on a festival.

Institutional staff should develop an awareness that, for the observant Jew, weekday pursuits such as work, travel, shaving and the use of writing instruments or electrical appliances (lights, elevators, automobiles, radio/tv, telephones, machinery, etc.) are forbidden on Biblically-mandated Holidays, just as they are forbidden on the Sabbath.

Carrying objects from one place to another, and kindling a fire from an existing flame are permitted on a festival, even when not needed for cooking but for some other purpose. C.J.L. ch. 98 §1. One may not strike a match or use a lighter to begin a new flame on the festival, but one may transfer a flame from one place to another.

One may also not extinguish a flame, but must let a flame burn out of its own accord. Accordingly, one may smoke a cigarette on a holiday, if it is lit from an existing flame (e.g., another cigarette or candle) and is not snuffed out when completed.

To comply with Jewish law, meal plans for Holiday eves and lunch on the Holiday itself should provide for kosher grape juice, two whole loaves of bread (or matzo), fish and meat. C.J.L. ch. 103.

Moreover, observant Jews may not eat foods that are not prepared in accordance with special rules governing cooking on Biblically-mandated Holidays. Accordingly, work schedules may need to be rearranged so that foods can be properly reheated by Jewish residents or staff on Biblically-mandated Jewish Holidays.

Prayer Services on Biblically-Mandated Holidays

Prayer services commence on the preceding evening before sunset and also are held on each Holiday morning, afternoon and evening. A portion of the Torah is read at each prayer service held on each Holiday morning.

The prayer services held on Holidays are far longer than on weekdays, containing as they do special additional prayers for the Holiday.

The “Kiddush” and Holiday Meals



Just as on the Sabbath, Holiday meals are begun with the recital of *Kiddush* (the sanctification blessing). It is meritorious to say the Kiddush over aged and perfect wine, but grape juice is accepted in the institutional setting. An effort should be made to procure wine that is red. C.J.L. ch. 77 §3. When wine or grape juice are unavailable, the Kiddush may be recited over two loaves of bread or whole matzot.

Women, too, are obligated to say the Kiddush. C.J.L. ch. 77 §4.

The Kiddush may be recited by one person for all present. All who hear the blessings respond: “Amen.”

A benediction (the “*Ha-Motzi*”) is then recited over two loaves of braided bread (“*Challahs*”), or two matzot or other whole rolls. One should be as lavish with meat, wine, and dainties as means permit. C.J.L. ch. 103 §3.

The “*Havdalah*” Service At the Conclusion of Biblically-Mandated Holidays

Just as it is mandatory to sanctify Biblically-mandated Holidays when they are ushered in, so is it mandatory to sanctify their departure by performing the “*Havdalah*” ritual. This ritual is a solemnization of the Holiday’s departure by a blessing over wine or grape juice and the lighting of a twined, multi-wicked candle or two flames from any source brought together to form a single “torch” for the duration of the ceremony. C.J.L. chs. 75; 103 §4.

When wine cannot be procured, the *Havdalah* may be recited over other beverage, including grape juice, beer, or a beverage that is a national drink, except water and soda. C.J.L. ch. 96 §3.

One person may recite the *Havdalah* on behalf of the group present. All who hear the blessings say “Amen” at the appropriate places. Women, too, must recite the *Havdalah* when there are no men to recite it for them.



Preferably, the *Havdalah* candle should be of wax and consist of several strands twisted together so as to form a torch. But if one does not have a *Havdalah* candle made of paraffin, one should use two ordinary candles, holding them close together so that both flames merge in one like a torch. C.J.L. ch. 96 §9. In extreme circumstances, two matches may be used. The flame is required to burn only for the duration of the blessing, and is extinguished afterwards.

Citations to Jewish law throughout this report are to Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, CODE OF JEWISH LAW: KITZUR [ABRIDGED] SHULHAN ARUKH, A COMPILATION OF JEWISH LAWS AND CUSTOMS (translated by Hyman E. Goldin, LL.B., annotated revised edition, Hebrew Publishing Company 1993) (“C.J.L.”), a copy of which can be ordered through the Aleph Institute or from any Jewish Bookstore. Jewish law frowns upon the use of the actual word representing the Creator’s name. Accordingly, references in this report to the Creator are indicated as “G-d.”

Information in this report is excerpted from the INSTITUTIONAL HANDBOOK OF JEWISH PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE, published by the Aleph Institute and highly recommended to chaplains and institutional staff working with Jewish men and women. Copyright © 1994 The Aleph Institute. All rights reserved.